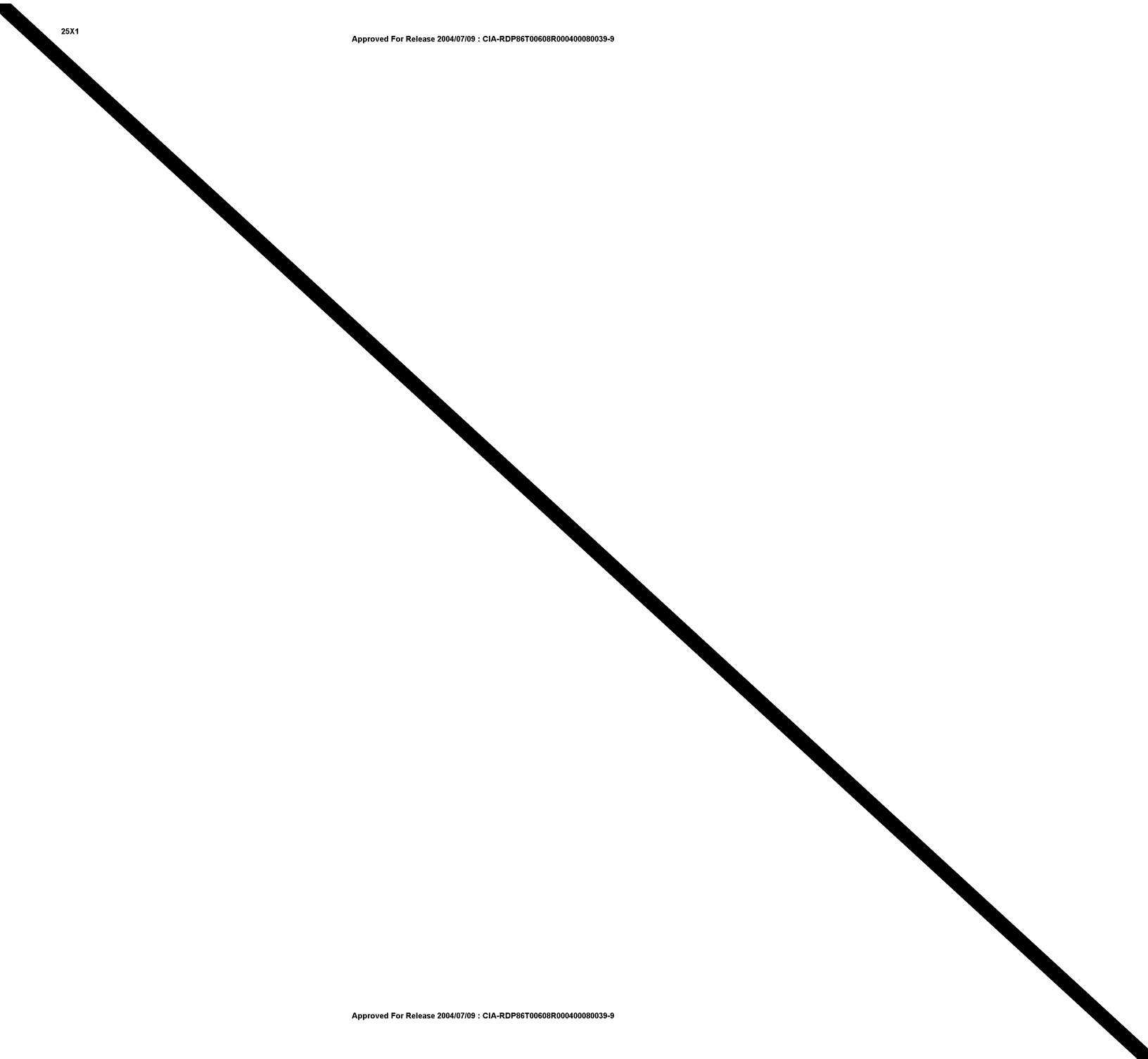
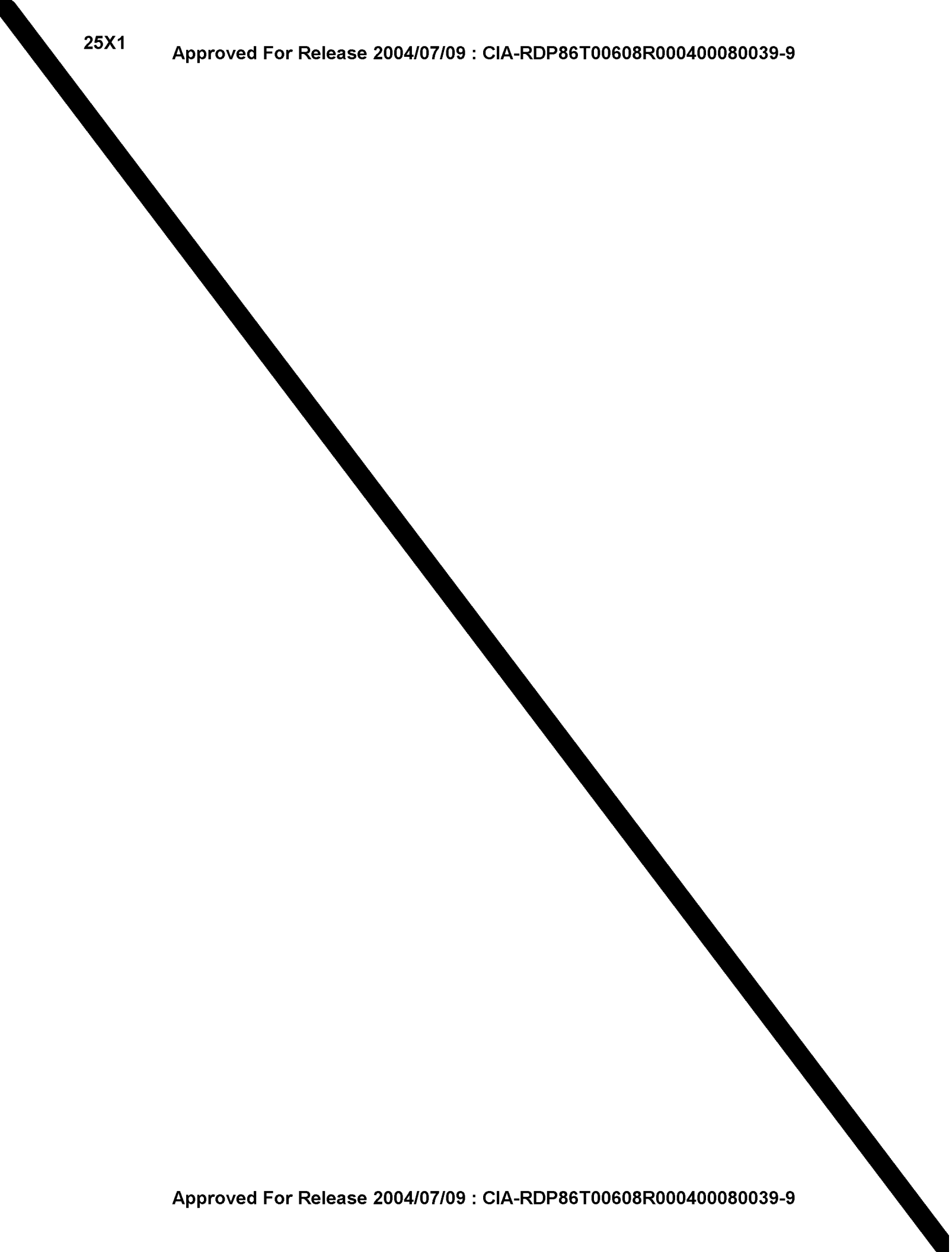


STAFF NOTES:

Soviet Union
Eastern Europe



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Brezhnev's Speech

Brezhnev's speech at the V-E Day celebrations was, as appropriate to the occasion, heavy on oratory and short on substance. Its tone was confident, and, according to US observers, Brezhnev spoke with vigor and animation.

Brezhnev expressed the Soviet Union's hope for better relations with the US, but avoided subjects such as the coming summit meeting in Washington. Picking up on a theme recently enunciated by Defense Minister Grechko, Brezhnev cited the allied cooperation during World War II as relevant to the more complicated task of preventing another "worldwide disaster." Brezhnev did not, however, repeat Grechko's explicit reference to "political and military cooperation." In the same vein, Brezhnev called for "concrete agreements" to reduce arms, but did not mention the recently recessed SALT talks.

The speech's rhetoric was colored by the Communist victory in Vietnam. Brezhnev said, for example, that it was "high time that those whom this concerns recognize that the suppression of the liberation movement is doomed to fail." As has become usual in recent Soviet commentary on Vietnam, Brezhnev did not specifically mention the US, but he put the "foreign interventionists" ahead of the "henchmen" as those who had been defeated.

The Soviet party chief went on to say, however, that the elimination of the Vietnam "hotbed" creates conditions for a better international atmosphere and better relations between the Soviet Union and the US. It has been clear for some time that Moscow has not wanted the Vietnam war unduly to complicate its relations with the US.

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The only fresh theme to emerge in Brezhnev's speech is his suggestion that the European Security conference could serve as an example for other parts of the world. This may be Moscow's way of kicking off another effort to stimulate interest in an Asian collective security scheme.

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The Soviet Tiger Purrs in Bonn

Soviet Ambassador Abrasimov, who many West Germans believe was returned to East Berlin in order to present a harsher line to West Germany, was benign and almost cuddly in his first interview with Bonn's permanent representative to the East German government. Abrasimov tried hard to cultivate a special Soviet - West German relationship, advising the FRG official to discuss any matter with him if he "foresaw difficulties" connected with West German ties with West Berlin. On several occasions Abrasimov referred to his high-level contacts in Moscow. "I am a good address," he said at one point. These references to powerful connections at home are vintage Abrasimov.

Abrasimov described the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin as in reality a six-power agreement, since the two Germanies were regularly consulted. While flattering to the West Germans, this concept is, as they well understand, a double-edged sword because it implies greater East German involvement. Abrasimov did not make any specific proposals, but he may be looking toward some form of six-power forum to increase East German participation in the negotiating process on West Berlin issues. Abrasimov also held out the lure of increased West German trade with the Soviet Union as an alternative in a time of Western economic crisis.

Abrasimov, a shrewd if sometimes transparent negotiator, has now completed a series of meetings with Western representatives since returning to his East Berlin post. As was his tactic during the four-power negotiations, he tried to create the feeling of a special personal relationship with each while he probed for areas of differences between Western powers, which he could play one against another.

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Shelepin Expected To Lose Trade Union Post

[redacted] expects Aleksandr Shelepin to lose his post as trade union chief at a coming meeting of the trade unions' Central Council. Shelepin has not made a public appearance since he was dropped from the Politburo on April 16. Other years he has met foreign labor leaders in Moscow for the May Day celebration, but this year one of his deputies was the host.

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Soviets Address Question of Stalin's Wartime Role

In an interview published in the April 30 issue of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Marshal A. M. Vasilevsky, chief of staff during most of World War II and later minister of defense, reviews Stalin's wartime role as commander in chief. This is the first detailed discussion of Stalin since publicity for the "Great Thirtieth" anniversary got under way early this year. Vasilevsky depicts Stalin in a generally sympathetic and positive light, but also calls attention to his faults.

Vasilevsky says that Stalin was an exceptional person with a contradictory and complex personality, a man who was profoundly aware of his position and responsibilities. An exacting leader, he kept his finger on the pulse of the war at all times and insisted on full and frequent accounting from his field commanders. Nonetheless he had a human side as well, and Vasilevsky cites instances intended to show that Stalin was capable of kind feeling toward favored subordinates, including Vasilevsky.

Vasilevsky differentiates between Stalin's performance in the early stages of the war and his leadership later on. Early in the war Stalin "clearly overestimated his forces and his knowledge" and tried to solve fundamental problems by himself, a procedure that led to complications and "heavy losses." But, Vasilevsky claims, Stalin learned from his mistakes. Beginning with the battle of Stalingrad, his attitude--at least toward those involved in strategic decision making--became less authoritarian.

Unlike other senior military commentators, such as Grechko and Yakubovskiy, Vasilevsky does not accord the party exclusive credit for leading

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the country to victory. In his version, the major decisions came from the supreme headquarters and the general staff, acting in concert with Stalin. Collectivity of decision making was required, Vasilevsky asserts, because the complexity of the war made it impossible for "any one man" to make unerring decisions.

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Czechoslovakia: Military EEO Program

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Prior to 1968, the Slovaks, who constitute approximately 30 percent of the Czechoslovak population, complained--with ample justification--that they had been treated as second-class citizens by the majority Czechs. Slovak dissatisfaction played an important role in bringing down party leader Antonin Novotny and opening the way for the 1968 reform.

Under Novotny's successors, Dubcek and Husak--both Slovaks--the proportion of Slovaks in higher offices has sharply increased. For instance, the defense minister and four of the ministry's top ten military leaders are Slovaks, while one is of Ukrainian descent and four are Czechs. The marked increase in Slovak participation has drawn some criticism from Czechs, who reportedly feel that it is they who now occupy the back seat.

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After Mindszenty

The death of 83-year old Jozsef Cardinal Mindszenty reopens the troublesome problem of selecting a successor to head the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary.

Mindszenty ceased to be an irritant in Vatican-Hungarian relations in February 1974, when the Vatican divested Mindszenty of his title as Archbishop of Esztergom (and primate of Hungary). It was apparently decided, however, not to fill the position until after Mindszenty's death. Early this year, the Holy See announced a number of high-level appointemnts to the Hungarian church hierarchy, but named an unknown cleric as auxiliary bishop of the Esztergom diocese.

Both Budapest and the Vatican probably now want to see the vacancy filled, but they may have difficulty agreeing on a candidate. The Vatican has been making an effort to improve relations with Eastern Europe, but apparently has qualms about promoting the present senior bishop in the Hungarian church who would be the logical successor. It may decide to bypass the bishop by delaying an appointment until he retires in two years.

Although Budapest has followed a relatively tolerant policy toward the church in recent months, it probably will be very cautious in agreeing to any Vatican nominee. Ideally, the Hungarian regime wants a successor whose manner of cooperation with the regime will help to negate the Mindszenty legacy and to bolster its own political legitimacy. The jurisdictional boundaries of the Esztergom diocese--which includes parts of Slovakia--could well complicate the selection process.

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